

KENNESAW STATE UNIVERSITY ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

***HISTORY OF THE COBB COUNTY BRANCH OF THE NAACP AND CIVIL RIGHTS
ACTIVITIES IN COBB COUNTY, GEORGIA***

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INTERVIEW WITH FELECCA WILSON TAYLOR

COBB NAACP/CIVIL RIGHTS SERIES, NO. 2

CONDUCTED BY JESSICA RENEE DRYSDALE

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Kennesaw State University Oral History Project
Cobb NAACP/Civil Rights Series, No. 2
Interview with Felecca Wilson Taylor
Conducted by Jessica Renee Drysdale
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JESSICA DRYSDALE: To begin why don't you tell me a little bit about your background?

FELECCA WILSON TAYLOR: I was born here in Cobb County, at home, which was not unusual at the time. I attended Lemon Street Elementary and Lemon Street High School. I graduated with honors. I attended Albany State University, taught in Miami and then came home to work on my graduate degree. When I came back Kennesaw State, at that time, was a two-year junior college; they had just started it. I stayed here for a while, attending Georgia State University. I started a couple of Black awareness groups, worked at the library as an assistant librarian and I was a storyteller for a while. I married a marine, which I swore I'd never marry somebody in the service, but married a marine and began traveling with him. When he retired we came back home. So that's pretty much it. I've been in and out of Cobb all my life, no matter where else we go, this was home because my parents were here. My brother is out in Texas but we all grew up here so I think of it as home.

JD: How would you describe race relations in Cobb County when you were growing up here?

FT: Well, and I'm going to refer back to an earlier conversation I think I had with your class, race relations in Cobb County were a little bit different from a lot of other areas. Although there were identifiable Black neighborhoods there was not an identifiable Black area, so to speak, because, especially in the county and in parts of Marietta as well, the neighborhoods were integrated. The schools were segregated which was crazy. You play together all day but then when it comes time to go to school Monday morning one goes one way and one goes the other. Some of the neighborhoods were integrated. Farmers lived next door to other farmers and it didn't really matter whether they were Black or White. The area up on the Square was predominantly White businesses, in fact they were all White businesses, but that area right off the square on Lawrence Street was all Black businesses and there was a good relationship with that. Now, were there odd spots and name calling and fights and stuff, yes, but I think the major difference was we knew each other. I know that sounds crazy, especially to someone as young as you are, but when you know somebody, when this is the man who took your wife to the doctor, or this is the man that gave you a ride into town, or this was the man that fed your family, when you all have that relationship it's really hard to hate someone based solely on color.

Because segregation was institutionalized and justified by the courts, there were certain things that were just, "*this is the way it is,*" but it didn't mean that everybody who followed those rules believed in them. I knew intrinsically and because my mother made it a point to let me know, (because of potential danger), that there were certain things that

I wasn't supposed to be able to do or I wasn't supposed to do because I was Black. By the same token, my mother would go to the Cobb Democratic women's meeting. She took me to almost every meeting and it was only when I got older that I realized that most of the people in there were White. There was my mom, (Hattie Wilson), a lady named Ms. Ercelene Adams and Kathryn Woods were the three Black women that I remember. When I got older, I used to mess with my mom and tell her that "the only reason they let you come is because all of you look alike, you all blend in." But it was never "oh, you can't go," it was just, okay. It was just one of those things where the institution of segregation, like the institution of slavery, was the law of the land but it was not necessarily what was in every man's heart. There was always cooperation between certain people and then there were certain people that never wanted to see a change. If they had their way we'd be in pre-1950 Cobb.

JD: Was it difficult to understand as a child why the neighborhoods were integrated but you had to go to a separate school and you had different rules?

FT: Well, it was hard but you see your parents made you, (and I will give credit to every Black parent of that time), they made us to understand some things about the law and who we were. The law tried to make us think that we were inferior and that's why we had a separate school. Even though our parents were being taxed at the same rate, the money was not being spent at the same rate on the Black schools. But our parents and our teachers, and this is the one thing that I had to work on, and in fact this is the primary reason I started my Black awareness group here at the library, because these kids didn't get it, that they were descendants from kings and queens, that segregation was the White man's problem, not ours. We missed feeling inferior because I had extraordinary teachers. I made the joke that I had books that were so old. For example, I remember my history book, were so old that it listed people as president that had been dead for several years. But I had teachers, like Lewis Scott, teachers like Preston Williams, teachers like Aaron Adams; I had teachers who took the time to go out and buy a paper or have the paper delivered. I didn't know that the paper would deliver free to schools but my teachers did. We had to read the paper; that was our social studies, that was our current affairs and then put it in context so that you understood that while this is being challenged in court it is based on this law and this is what has happened before. They always kept things in context so that it was very relevant. When I look at those teachers now I am in awe, because I taught school for a while and I understand how much work they had to put in, but our teachers cared about us individually.

The other thing is our teachers attended the same churches we did, went to the same doctors, because there were very few Black doctors, went to the same pharmacists that we did. So, they saw your parents and there was a fear that when a teacher walked up to your mom or your dad and said "I need to talk to you when you get a minute," every child just cringed because every parent let us know that education was the most important goal we could attain, because nobody could take from you what was in your head. They may kill you, they may maim you, they may in some way harm you physically, mentally, financially, they could take all of your money, they could take your wife, they could take your dog, they could do whatever they wanted, they could take your land, they couldn't

take an education. They could deny a degree but they couldn't take what was in your head. So once we got that then all of the other stuff became secondary.

Yeah, I would do things and say, "Well, I don't understand why don't you all just stop paying taxes." I would be told, "No, that's not the law." The law is that if you own a home, you pay taxes or if you buy a car you pay taxes. My response would be, "well, the law's not fair." The response would be, "Then you need to change the law." But there was never a question that it was going to change, they just believed, and they wanted us to be prepared for the change. The only way to do that was to be educated and they made sure that we were educated. I knew about Phyllis Wheatley long before I got to college and they didn't. I use Phyllis Wheatley only because she was one of, in fact, she is the first Black woman to have her poetry published. This is during the time of slavery when she wasn't even supposed to be allowed to read. It was against the law for her to learn to read and yet she is writing poetry that the president is quoting. But I knew about it because I had English teachers that made sure that I didn't learn just about Shakespeare. I learned about Alexander Dumas and the fact that first of all, not only was he a French man, but he was a Black man. So, she made sure that we knew and that was so important. What I realized is that these children don't get that and it is no knock on White teachers, but sometime after integration young White teachers, and this was based on what they had heard, what they had been told because they had no experience, didn't expect as much from Black students. Black students are like any other students; if you don't expect much, you don't get much. It has been proven over and over. There are plenty of educational studies to prove that children, period, Black, White, yellow, red, it doesn't matter, children rise to the teacher's expectations. Our teachers expected greatness and they got it. Now were we all great? No. Were we all excellent? No, but we were the best that we could be because our teachers expected it. They didn't make excuses. I knew a young man that has an IQ somewhere of 74, 76 or something like that. He's in the educably mentally retarded range. As a teacher, I understand that. He can be trained to do simple tasks; he should be able to function somewhat alone but with guidance. He graduated. We didn't have a special education class, I tell my friends, special education covers the mentally disabled, the physically handicapped, as well as the gifted. All of that is special education so just because your child is a genius, she's still in special ed. I have to tell my friends who say, "Oh, my child's a genius." I say, "Well, she's in special ed. I know I used to teach." The thing that I'm getting to is that our teachers would sit there and say, "Well, now I know you're not going to get an A. You're not going to learn everything I'm teaching but I expect for you to get at least a C." And they didn't give him points or let him take extra time. They worked with him after school, before school, they made time, and they told the parents, "He needs to come in and see me thirty minutes before school every day." The parents knew. They got him in there. That same young man has four children all of whom went to college, one of them is a doctor now, but had he been in school now he would have been put in special ed, given busy work to do with no expectations.

So the really good part about that is that people expected everything from us. I told my daughter one time, "When I walked out the door I knew every day I walked out the door I carried the weight of the Black community on my shoulders because whatever I did

reflected on every Black person in the community.” First of all, it was a small community, it wasn’t fifteen or twenty percent of the population. We all knew each other but because of the way that we were set up a lot of Whites knew you too. In fact, one of the things we’re going to talk about later with the whole sit-in is, “oh, you are Mrs. Hattie’s child.” It was that kind of thing. So everybody expected great things from us. We succeeded in spite of segregation. In fact, I tell people sometimes I think we succeeded because of it because our students primarily went to historically Black colleges where, long before Georgia had a no pass, no play rule, Black colleges did that. You didn’t pass, you didn’t play. You came to college to get a degree. If you happened to get drafted for the pros that was a bonus because that was unusual, but what you did do was get your lesson. Now we understood athletes were on the five-year plan, but you still graduated. There was just no excuse. I made my first money in college, actually, tutoring athletes. Coach Rainey, came to me and said, “I understand you’re pretty smart.” And I said, “Well, I understand that too.” He said, “Let me tell you what I need. My ball players have to pass and if they don’t pass they can’t play.” And he paid me. He actually said, “If you find yourself liking one of them, let me know and I’ll give him to another tutor. It’s okay for you to like him but I can’t pay for y’all to court on my time.” I thought that was funny because I didn’t see me liking any of them; they were dumb jocks as far as I was concerned. I made my money making sure that they understood their class work and it wasn’t like I could sit there and do their homework. They had to understand it because he was checking back with their teachers to make sure that in class they were able to perform as well as they did in the homework, so I really had to teach. That’s when I really think I began to find out even though I had done Girl Scouts and Head Start and a whole bunch of other things that I’d been teaching, I really understood that I’m good at explaining stuff so that people get it. I’d rather spend ten hours on explaining one concept and know that when you leave you’ve got that one. You may not have the other nine but you’ve got that one. I don’t know if I totally answered your question but I was trying to.

JD: That’s great. Do you think that your experience in a segregated school was common to the Black community or do you think that it was unique to you in that your teachers really made that effort?

FT: No, it was common. We laughed about it the other day because we do a thing every two years called the Marietta-Cobb Homecoming, where we invite everybody who’s ever lived in Cobb County to come back and we have a week’s worth of activities and stuff and it’s fun. In our school and in our class there are doctors, there are lawyers, there are Ph.D. professors, there are college professors, there are authors, there are writers, there are musicians, all walks of life, but every one of them made sure that they aimed high. Now, did we all get to where we wanted to be? No. Because my book is still not printed, this building is still not a museum that I’m working on, but I haven’t stopped. I didn’t just say, “Oh, I didn’t get it this month so let me just quit and go do something else.” It was always understood it took work but it was not unique to me, nor was it unique to Lemon Street High school. I think that if you talk to most people over sixty who attended all Black high schools most of them, a great majority of them will say that that was the best thing about it. They look at their grandkids and their kids and realize that integrated

schools weren't all they were cracked up to be because people didn't have the expectations of them.

I watched my brother who had to finish his senior year at Marietta High, which was cute because he announced he wasn't going and my mama announced she was going to quit her job and go with him every day because he was going to graduate. My brother's IQ is higher than mine but you couldn't have told by the first six weeks grades. He went in and my mom is like, "Are you crazy?" He said, "Hey, a C is passing." And my mom said, "C is not passing at Montgomery Street," (which is where we lived). He said, "Mom, they don't care. I could be the only one raising my hand and they won't call on me. They will call on somebody else and give them the answer before they call on me. I'm not going through it." My mother informed him that yes, he was going to go through it and if he had to start standing up in the room and blurting out the answer she would come over there and deal with the disruption of class but that he was going to prove that he had a brain and he was going to join the band, which was the other thing. "Mom, it's a God-awful band." It wasn't awful but it wasn't the band he was used to. It is the difference between a college band and a high school band. We played like a college band because we had college professors who were our band directors who treated us like the only thing we had to do was music twenty-four/seven, that we were all music majors. This was their attitude toward the music and if you didn't have that same attitude you were gone. It wasn't that they didn't like you. You just had to have a certain attitude.

So no, I don't think it was unique to me or even unique to Lemon Street. When they closed Lemon Street I found out something I didn't know. I found out that most of my teachers had Ph.D.'s; they could have been teaching on a college level all along but chose not to. They chose instead to teach Black children to make sure that they inspired us like somebody inspired them and it worked. In fact, I told Mr. Scott when I graduated from college I said, "You did it to me." Because I had an offer of a scholarship to Harvard to go to grad school, I had a job offer with the Boston Globe which I thought was cute, because my job at the Boston Globe was to report on the doings on campus of Harvard so essentially I was going to get a job to pay me to go to class and say what was going on. But instead I went to Miami to inner city school to teach because I realized that these children weren't getting what I got so I became determined to do for them what somebody did for me. No excuses. Do your best. I came back home that Christmas and told Mr. Scott, I said, "Mr. Scott I was standing in front of my class, going 'good behavior and hard work,' I was you." He said, "Well, that's a good thing Ms. Wilson." "No, it's not." But I understood, especially after all the sit-ins and all the things that happened at Albany State. I perfectly understood it and I was already looking at children who were being told, "Oh, you're Black, you're loud, you go to special ed." It had nothing to do with their ability to perform. The teachers didn't choose to change their method of teaching; they blamed it on the students rather than maybe I just don't know how to relate to this kid.

I had a couple of kids when I was teaching high school that I just couldn't deal with, but I also had a friend, who taught the same thing right across the hall from me, who had two young boys and every day they'd manage to turn her class into a race relations class.

“You don’t like me because I’m Black, my answer is wrong because I’m Black.” So, we agreed; she took my two and I took her two and then we went down and told Dr. Wax, our principal, what we were going to do. We were teaching pretty much the same things. Well, they came in the room and I’m standing there with this huge, red Afro, short mini dress or bell bottoms and it was like, “Okay, this Black thing ain’t going to work in this room.” “But she didn’t like us,” they said. “Okay, she didn’t like you because you were Black. I’ll buy that for you but why am I not going to like you? Let me tell you why. I’m not going to like you if you don’t do your work.” I took away their one argument. They begged her to take them back. “She’s meaner than you ever were.” Well, see, I’m not buying into it. And the two that I sent her, one did exceptionally well and I knew he would, the other one she had a problem with him too, but he still managed to pass. That was the thing, so long as they passed, but it was, to answer your initial question, no it was not unique and a lot of Black teachers that you see teaching are teaching because some teacher expected great things from them. In some cases it was not always a Black teacher. Those of us over sixty, the younger ones, there was one teacher that said, “You’re not living up to your potential. An apple has a potential to be an apple pie, apple juice, apple cider, garnish for a fruit tray or it can rot on the vine if we don’t utilize it. We have teachers who step up, Black and White, and that’s why I say, it’s not a knock on White teachers; it’s a knock on the time frame because in that time frame those teachers didn’t expect much. They were geared to believe that, “Oh, they’re not going to do well.”

JD: What year was it that you were teaching in Miami?

FT: Oh Lord, ’69 through I think ’71.

JD: What grades were you teaching?

FT: In Miami I taught eighth grade and then I taught high school, so, eighth through twelfth in Miami.

JD: Okay. So, your brother was the first graduating integrated class from Marietta High, correct?

FT: Yes.

JD: What sort of impact did that have on your family? What was it like for him?

FT: I felt sorry for him. I did, I really felt sorry for him because he had to go over there with them and he was mad because he said, "It’s your fault, you should have gone." Because when they were trying to do an end around the Supreme Court decision they decided that they were going to partially integrate so they could say, the one Black person in the middle of the picture kind of thing, “We’re integrated, leave us alone!” They approached my mother about me because they knew first of all in eighth grade, I took the high school SAT’s and scored the highest score in Georgia so they knew I could do the work. It wasn’t a question of whether I could do the work. But I said, “I ain’t going.” Mama

said, "You'll go if I tell you go." "Yeah, okay, I'm going to fight every day because the first one call me a nigger I'm going to bust them in the face." I knew I was going to fight, I was a tomboy. I was prepared to fight. In fact, I would have been angry if somebody hadn't called me nigger so I could fight. I mean, I was going in with a chip on my shoulder the size of a cinder block. We discussed this a lot, which was unusual because usually what my mother said was the end of it. She said it and you did it and it was like God speaking. But my dad, I remember him coming in and saying, "You know that child is going to fight over there every day." "Well, she's just going to stop fighting then." He said, "Okay, she's going to fight, you going to whip her every day. How much do you think she's going to learn?" Well, she's going to go over there and she's going to do this and they're trying to do that and once they get one or two over there then it should start to get better." He said, "Don't send her. She's going to fight every day." She said, "Yeah." I said, "Plus, I can go to Spellman, I don't have to go to high school. I can skip this whole thing; I've got a scholarship already. I can not go." "You can't go without my permission." "That's not what the lady from Spellman said."

So, the first two that integrated Marietta High were Dexter Treville Grady and Daphne Delk. Those two young ladies went over there because they, (representatives from the Marietta Board of Education), approached their parents. Daphne, I think you all will remember me talking about Lettie Williams; Daphne was her niece. Daphne, today, is the sweetest, kindest soul. It's hard to be mad with Daphne for anything. She was the perfect temperament for that environment. Treville, on the other hand was not quite as perfect but they were friends so they formed a bond. Now, when my brother went it was a whole class, they had shut down the school so he had no choice. If he was going to graduate he had to go to Marietta High. Prior to them closing Lemon Street, however, the county did something that was smart. They said, "You know what, this is the law, we're not going to waste taxpayers money trying to appeal this." Immediately, I think Sprayberry at that time was over on Allgood Road and 41, they took their kids first. Osborne, I think, was it Osborne or Campbell, one of the two down in Smyrna, it might have been Campbell because I think Osborne came out of Campbell but they just said, "Your students live in our neighborhood, don't bus them past, just drop them off here." Because, see all the Black county school students came to Lemon Street. It was the only high school, period, in the county for Black kids. Austell, wherever they lived, the schools just kind of said "Just drop ours off. We're not going to fight this any more." So, before Marietta High integrated, the various county schools of that period had already integrated because they weren't going to waste taxpayer's money. They knew eventually they were going to lose so it was kind of like, you know, there's a better use for the money. Like one guy told me later, he said, "We got the benefit, we had well trained band members, we had students who were used to studying, we had football players that could play we knew because you had state championship," he said, "What were we losing?" Plus the county gained money whereas before they were paying Lemon Street to take the Black students." That was money back in their coffers that they didn't have to spend any more because now their county students were attending county schools. In fact, Wanda had the choice. She could go to Marietta High or North Cobb. She lived up on James Street in Marietta. She technically lived in Marietta City limits but she chose North Cobb.

JD: What was her last name?

FT: Her name is Wanda, I want to say Wilkins. It's Wanda Edwards or Wanda Wilkins, but I've got her number for you. In fact, her mother was the first female trustee of Zion. She chose North Cobb but she had that choice because the schools, everybody was trying to figure out a way around this. This is the law. And like I said, there were only a few people that were overtly and openly angry. I think Blacks were angrier than some Whites, but we were angry about the underhanded way it was done. When they announced that the school was going to close in June of '66 right after graduation they came down and tore this building down in the summer. You've seen demolition; it takes months to demolish a whole building. This is a three-story building without an outbuilding they tore it down. When I say tore it down, tore it down to the foundation and then covered over the foundation between June and August when school was supposed to start back. The kids had no choice, especially Marietta city kids, they had to go. What the Black community proposed, and my mother and Frank Sexton and some of the others that were leaders in that time, was that everybody that lived north and east of the Square had to come to Lemon Street. Everybody that lived south and west of the Square had to go to Marietta High. That would have fully integrated both schools. Well of course, there were a whole lot of White parents that did not want their kids to come to this fire trap that was Lemon Street and the response was it shouldn't be a firetrap, we pay taxes too so if it needs to be brought up to the same minimums that Marietta High has then you just have to spend more money. We're paying the bonds, we're paying the taxes. Instead, they underhandedly announced that the schools were going to be closed and that they were thinking, there were several alternatives, one of them was the two schools, one was a blended school with a whole brand new high school, you know, there were lots of things they were quote talking about, unquote. What they did was destroyed a building overnight, pretty much overnight. You drove down the street one day and it was there and you came down a week later and there were things missing. In fact, part of what I'm doing with this Black heritage museum, I know that we had a roomful of trophies from the football and the band and the cheerleaders and all of the different clubs, the 4-H and the SLAGS, which are Student Library Assistants of Georgia, all of these groups had trophies that we had earned. For a while those trophies were in the basement of the old Marietta High. I'm trying to find them. I think they should be on display. I think that my child needs to see that before some of the people that are currently celebrated and held up as examples, that there were football players and basketball players and baseball players who went to the pros, some of them straight out of high school, and didn't go to college. Millbrooks is an excellent example. Charles Millbrooks played pro baseball for years. He didn't go to college that I know of. He just had a fastball that burned your hand and he was a great looking guy. He's dead so he does not have to hear me say that he was a great looking guy because I used to tell him he was ugly but he was a great guy, a lot of fun, but he was a pro ball player.

Coach [Ben] Wilkins, which is the "Be Somebody," Coach Wilkins was our coach at Lemon Street. He went to Marietta High to keep the lid on. His wife said, "I'm not going." Because for one thing they wanted all of the teachers that were department chairs

and stuff at Lemon Street, suddenly you've got to be under first year teachers. You've been teaching thirty years and now you're under a first year teacher. You were the department chair but now they would rather have somebody who has only five years experience that's your boss. And it does happen sometimes in the normal course of events. Okay, maybe you went on and got your Ph.D. and I stopped with my Master's and you come in later and within two years you're my boss, I can see that because you have additional training. But when you have no more training, in fact, you have less training and less experience, the only reason that you are my boss is to keep the status quo. Coach Wilkins went over there and said that he would be an assistant coach. Coach [James] "Friday" [Richards], the guy that's the coach now at Marietta High was in that class. He graduated with my brother. There were times I'm sure those kids went to Coach Wilkins for everything. You have to understand Coach Wilkins also played pro ball. He was ex-Army. Coach Wilkins was six feet something, big broad shoulder and a really big voice, so when he spoke everybody listened. It wasn't a matter of Black or White, male or female, when he said something you just all shut up and say, "What did you say coach?" He just had a commanding presence. He was a very gentle man but a commanding presence about himself.

When the kids were having problems with other kids or being picked on or not being called on in class, a lot of them went to Coach Wilkins. I was at Albany State and I went over to Marietta High a couple of times because my brother was complaining and my mom was in a tizzy. She said, "I don't know what I'm going to do, your brother is going to end up quitting school and I'm not going to have a drop out in the house and he's going to have to do something." I said, "I'm coming home at Christmas." So I went over and talked to a couple of his teachers and I explained to one lady, and I don't even remember the woman's name, I said, "I need to talk to you about Dwight Wilson." "Well, I can't talk to you because you're not his mom." I said, "Ma'am, please talk to me. You really don't want my mother to come over here. Let me do this. First of all, he's smarter than I am, he does his work, but he is getting disgusted in his class because you never call on him, you find little things to reduce his grade, like you'll find that his margin was an inch and a half and you told him an inch and you take off for his but somebody else has gotten it written on a postcard and it's okay. You can't keep doing that." "Well, he needs to follow the rules." "Ma'am, I wouldn't mind that if everybody followed the rules. The problem is going to be you keep picking on my little brother, I'm going to have to come and bring my friends. Now you really don't want me to come and bring my friends. So let's see if we can start this over. You're going to come in and you're going to treat him the same way you treat everybody else. I don't want special treatment for him, but I want equal treatment." "Well, you don't understand and you're not here." "Ma'am, you don't want me here everyday, you really don't." And at that time, and even now with me talking to you, I have to keep remembering to keep my voice up because it does get deep. I know that it gets deep and it is naturally very deep. But because I was thin and I had just started wearing an Afro so now you got this tall, skinny Black woman looking like some kind of Watusi warrior standing over this woman saying "you really don't want me to bring my friends, do you? Do you watch the news? Have you seen the papers? They're just burning down buildings? Do you want me to tell you how to make a Molotov cocktail? Ma'am, you don't want me to come and you certainly

don't want my mother over here every day." Then I went and talked to Coach Wilkins and told him what I told her and he said, "Felecca, now you can't be threatening people." "Coach, I didn't threaten her, I just promised her that if she doesn't leave Dwight alone something may happen." He said, "But you bother Dwight" and I said, "He's my little brother. I can bother him. He's over here to get an education. She's going to leave him alone. If I have to come back I'm coming back with friends." Which, I did have some friends that were just like, "let's go burn the whole building down." "No, let's don't burn the whole building down because the Black kids still need an education." If they had left Lemon Street up they probably would have burned it down just because then they got somewhere else to go but they had nowhere else to go if we burn this building down. So, I said, "Let's don't burn it down but we are going to have to keep an eye." But again it was teachers with low expectations, with preconceived notions and again it was because they didn't know these people.

Sometimes I liken it to when I was living in Hawaii. I worked in an Asian bank. I had some preconceived notions about Asians, not all of them negative but some were. I worked in an Asian bank and there were ten of us that were not Asian. Weekly I knocked out some of my preconceptions. Sometimes I'd sit there and go, "That's why they say 'such and such about Asians,'" or I'd mess with my friends by saying, "This is why you got the stereotype because Asians such and such." I won't say I ever hated them but I did have my ideas and especially after Vietnam because I had friends who died in Vietnam so I had some ideas about how they were. I immersed myself in the culture there with them, found out that half the stuff I thought was wrong. Now the other half was based on some truths but half of it, like I said, it wasn't always negative, it was just "Oh, what Asians do," or "Jews do," or "Blacks do." People take one bit of truth and stretch it into a whole big stereotype and it obscures that bit of truth.

JD: So you're just saying you think that if each community had taken the time to really understand each other then things would have been better?

FT: Well, here, because of the way we had grown up, they were better than a lot of places. I think in some areas Atlanta is a prime example, the Black communities and the White communities in Atlanta for the most part, except for the upper middle class and the very wealthy, operated totally separately. They operated in parallel but not in unison. They were, as the Bible says, "unevenly yoked," because anything Blacks wanted was on Auburn Avenue or at the Royal Peacock or some of the other clubs and businesses. Anything Whites wanted from Atlanta was downtown or in Buckhead. But Ivan Allen, Maynard Jackson's family, some of the other upper class families, the wealthier families, they operated on a whole different strata. Here, for the most part, in Cobb County, there were some really well to do people, Black and White. Most of us were middle class and poor so that's a different intermingling because we're all in this together. If everybody's making \$10,000 a year or \$5,000 a year, which incidentally, \$5,000 a year is a lot of money, a lot of money. The first job I took teaching I made \$5,700 because I was teaching in a high risk school and Dade County, Florida was actually paying more than the state of Georgia. So, \$5,700 and that was gross that was not net. I had to pay all of my expenses out of that so putting that in perspective, somebody who was a doctor or a

lawyer making \$20,000 a year was considered wealthy, whether you were Black or White. But here because of the way we lived and worked together there was not a definitive line as far as strata and class, so we didn't have as many problems as we could have had. We certainly didn't have the problems some of the other places did have because we did have that overlap.

JD: Why don't we back up a little bit? Can you talk a little bit about your mother and father and what they did for a living and how they influenced you?

FT: My mom, all of my adult life, well, all of my school life, I remember my mother working as a librarian. What you have to understand is most Black people had two or three jobs and they did it because again, they were planning on their children going to college and they knew that there were things that you needed that nobody was going to just give you. Nobody's giving you credit. You don't own any banks and that kind of stuff so you've got to work. My mother used to teach school well before me, my mother sold insurance for Guarantee Life and Insurance, my mother cleaned houses. In fact, she cleaned houses at the same time she was a librarian for a while and nobody thought that was strange. She went to college; she went to a historically Black college.

My father went to the Army, did four years and of course, it was a segregated army at the time, he got on at Georgia Power. Now my dad worked, before Georgia Power, he worked for the railroad, that I know of, then when he got on at Georgia Power, he drove cabs, cut grass, did whatever needed to be done. My dad found a way to make money. He did something that was unheard of at that time for Black or White men. My dad would bring his check home and give it to my mom every week that he got paid. But the cab money, the grass cutting money, any other hustles, that was his walk around money. But my mother got his check to pay the bills. At Georgia Power, my father had been classified as a general laborer for years and had trained others who became his supervisors. Well, the young people that were working for Georgia Power, and this was before Mr. Holmes was hired as the first Black in management there, when they said, "Well, we're going to sue Georgia Power because they're not paying us the same rate and they're not doing this, this and this and we believe we've got to sue." So one of the guys said, "Why don't you ask Mr. Wilson because he's been here longer than anybody." "Well, he's old and he's old-fashioned, they grew up in a different time, he'll probably say no." One of the kids said, "No, I'm going to ask him anyway. He can't do nothing but say no. If he wants to be an Uncle Tom, he'll just be an Uncle Tom." They asked my dad and he said "yes." He didn't come home and talk to my mom about it first, he simply said yes. Well, that put them in shock that threw them off. The young, Black workers thought, "He's old. It's wrong but if I'm the only one saying it's wrong, they just think I'm mad because I was passed over." Well, they went to court and they won. It was a class action suit, they had to pay, and I remember laughing because they had to pay my daddy back pay at plant supervisor pay starting from the first year that he had trained somebody to be his boss. They had to go back like fifteen years with base pay, increases, they had to pay all of this and then they had to adjust his salary and make him a plant supervisor. Well, they had a plant supervisor down at Plant Atkinson because that's where he was right there on South Cobb Drive. He said, "No, the kids' doing a good

job.” So he actually took a job up here in Cartersville for a while at Plant Bowen until this kid left to go to some other state and he retired as a plant supervisor there but it was just funny because we were like, “Dad, they had to give you a whip.” He said, “Yep. It ain’t no more money but now they’re doing the right thing.” And then the next thing you know we’ve got Mr. Holmes and we’ve got other Blacks in a position of management so hopefully that won’t ever happen again. And Georgia Power tried to say it first that “no they didn’t this, no they didn’t that.” And they were so stupid, they left a paper trail. I watch people get tripped up too many times on paper trails so they had memos, detailing. “Well, yes, I had Wilson train so and so.” But if Wilson was able to train them, Wilson should have been the one doing the job.

JD: What was his first name?

FT: My dad’s name is Emmanuel, but they all call him E.L. or Bro Wilson.

JD: Can you tell me about your sit-in experience at McLellan's?

FT: Okay, and I know I’m repeating myself because we went through this before, but the Cobb County youth, the NAACP, we wanted to get involved. We were watching sit-ins and march-ins and wade-ins and everything else and we wanted to do something. We used to meet down at Zion Baptist Church and Reverend Cook was the advisor to the youth group. We decided that we wanted to go sit-in at McLellan’s. Most of the restaurants allowed you to come in and order food to take out and I don’t remember any restaurants, and that doesn’t mean we didn’t have them, but I don’t remember any restaurants that had back doors. You came in the front door, you just had to get your stuff to go, you couldn’t sit down and wait, that I remember. Well, we decided we’re going to McLellan’s and we decided when. The problem was that I was younger than most of the other people who were going so he told me I couldn’t go but I said “I’m a member and I want to go.” There was a big to-do and he said “no.” Well, the day that they decided to go he told me to go home and of course I didn’t, I started following them up Haynes Street up to Lawrence Street because I was going to go. He got worried because you see this many kids going two by two up the sidewalk, any White person with half a brain can figure out they’re about to start something. Don’t know what, but something. Reverend Cook made me come walk with him.

Well, when we get to McLellan’s we’re taking up every seat there was and we’re all lined up and stuff and we’re sitting down. There was pushing from behind, there was name calling, you know, because immediately you know what this is. Blacks don’t sit-in at McLellan’s and we’re sitting at this long lunch counter so already we’re a problem. The lady ignored us and the Reverend Cook, who owned a bar and grille himself said, “Miss, we’d like to place an order.” She said, “I don’t serve niggers.” He said, “Well, I hadn’t planned to order any, could we see a menu?” Which is really stupid, it’s McLellan’s, its not going to be gourmet. But he asked and she said “No.” She said, “I don’t serve niggers.” Now she’s getting loud so there are people standing around and, “Nigger, you don’t belong here, why don’t you take your ass out.” It’s just going on and on and there was a lot of things said. People pushing up on us, but nobody’s getting hit or whatever.

Well, somebody had sense enough to call the chief of police and at that time I believe it was Bill Hutson who was chief of Marietta City Police and he came over and he went straight to Reverend Cook and he said, "Pastor, what's going on?" Reverend Cook said, "We wanted to order, we wanted to eat. Very simple." He looked at the lady and he said, "Ma'am..." She said, "I don't serve niggers." Reverend Cook said, "I didn't plan to order any. We just wanted to eat." He said, "Well, why can't they eat?" She said, "The grill's closed. I ain't serving these niggers." He said, "Okay, if the grill is closed, close the grill." He stood there until she cleaned the grease off the grill, emptied the grease pot, poured water through the things, unplugged the soda fountain, took the money out, counted it and turned her cash register drawer over. He said, "Pastor, seems the grill is closed today so I'm going to ask you all to leave otherwise, now you're trespassing so come with me."

So, we all walked outside: Bill Hutson, the other young Blacks, Reverend Cook and I. They were all seventeen or eighteen years old so they could go home. He said, "Pastor, I'm going to ask you to let them go home." He looked at me and said, "Aren't you Hattie's daughter?" "Yes sir," I answered with attitude. I always had an attitude. Everybody seemed to know my mama. Anyway, he said, "You come with me." Reverend Cook said, "I'll go with you." He said, "No, I'm going to go call her mother because I know she's not old enough. I can't just let her go home. Not even with you, even though she came with you." I couldn't go home with him because he wasn't my legal guardian. Everybody else he could say that they were young adults. Couldn't do it with me, I was a minor. So he gets me over to the court house, which was right there at the corner so it was kind of diagonal from McClellan's, and he says, "Where's Ms. Hattie today, is she down at the library or is she at home?" "I don't know. You the police, you find out." I had just an ugly attitude. So what really bothered me was he knew my mother's home phone number so he tried calling her and didn't get her and he said "I'll check again later, in the meantime, you go straight home." Yes, whatever. I was just ugly. He watched me walk down Cherokee Street. I was going to cut down the street and turn down Lawrence Street. Bill said, "Go home." So I get further down the street, where I think I'm going to cut down behind Lemon Street. Bill said, "Go home." I'm thinking, "This White man needs to leave me alone." I get down to North Forest Avenue, now, I know he can't see over this hill, I know. So I'm about to cut down through ere and come back down to the project. I look back and he's standing at the top of the hill. He had just quietly walked behind me. He said, "Go home." Well, by that time I was two blocks from the house, so I went down Montgomery Street and once you're on Montgomery Street you better go home because all the neighbors are going to say, "Hattie, I saw the baby, where was she coming from up in town in the middle of the day?" I had to go home then. So, I got home and by the time my mom got home I explained what happened. As I said, the irony of all of that was nobody got arrested, it wasn't a big deal.

Atherton owned a drug store on the square and when he heard about it, called Reverend Cook and said, "If they want to eat over here, they can." So, the next time they went, which I didn't get to go with them then, but when they went their waitress was the same way. She was not going to serve coloreds. She didn't say "niggers," she thought she was

being polite, she said “coloreds.” It was Atherton’s pharmacy and he ended up being mayor and he came to the pharmacy and put on an apron, took orders and served. Well, a couple of months later, I think it was a little less than a year, there was an explosion at Atherton’s Drugs, and of course we all thought it was retaliation. It turns out there was a gas leak but that was our immediate thought that somebody blew it up because he fed us.

JD: Was the name calling and pushing the extent of the reaction that you received at McLellan’s? How did you handle that?

FT: Yes. You have to understand the training for a sit-in is like boot camp. You don’t make eye contact because, just like they tell you now with road rage, eye contact infuriates the person even more. We had been trained that when you go and you sit-in to these places you just become a statue. There’s one person, and in this case it was Reverend Cook, there’s one person who speaks for everybody. You don’t react if you’re spit on, if you’re hit, if you’re pushed, if you get loud talk behind you, you don’t even flinch. You just stay focused on what you are supposed to be doing. So, though I know that we got looks and like I say, we got the bumps and pushes, I can’t tell you a lot of their reactions because I was focused on looking at the back of that counter. That was where I was supposed to be focused until she stood in front of me and said, “Can I take your order?” I wasn’t supposed to be looking to the side to see if they were pushing somebody else or pinching somebody. All I could focus on and all I was supposed to be focused on was that. We learned this is how you tuck your body to protect your vital organs if you’re being beat up and stuff. There’s a lot of stuff, there’s a whole boot camp involved in training for these sit-ins.

JD: What motivated you personally to become involved with that particular instance? What sort of expectations did you have?

FT: Well, I was motivated because I still couldn’t wrap my head around the concept of separate but equal. I couldn’t wrap myself around the concept of Whites and someone being superior to me. I say to me personally, I mean, I just took it as a personal affront that some of the people I saw thought that because they were White they were better than me. I had, (and again this goes back to being educated), to me I had more brains in my little finger than they had in their entire body and in some cases in their entire family. Yet, because they were White, they thought they were better. I knew in my heart, which is different from my head, but I knew in my heart that I could not live my life in a subservient position. I knew what my place was supposed to be based on what society said my place was supposed to be but you have to understand that society gave me all kinds of strikes. Not only was I Black, I was southern, I was female and I was smart. That’s four strikes; you only get three in baseball. Every day I wake up I’m still smart, I’m still Black, I’m still female, I’m still southern, so every day I’ve got to fight this battle. At some point I’m going to stop fighting some of these battles. This was my line in the sand and I wanted to go because I got tired of being the one that’s too little to do certain things. Every time they did other stuff, “Well, you’re too young.” I got tired of being too young. In my neighborhood I was the only girl so there were some things that

the boys would do, "You're a girl." I couldn't do. So it was, I was going to do it. I think if I had to walk up there by myself I would have done it.

JD: What year was the sit-in?

FT: I was still in, oh gosh, I was still in, I think I was in junior high, I might have been in ninth grade so that would have been '59 or '60 because I graduated in '64. It was early on. It was just one of those things where I was determined and in fact when I got to college my temper made the rest of them go, "Okay, you can help in other areas." You know, I helped with the training because I could be vicious with the training but they still didn't want me to actually sit-in because I would be the loose cannon. I'm the one that if you spit on me, then I'm going to punch you in your face, or I'm going to spit on you back. Well, that was the whole point of non-violence is that you didn't react. I, on the other hand, wanted to react. Once I graduated my mother worried for a while because I joined a group that firmly believed that we could not achieve full integration, and that, therefore, we should simply destroy everything and that idea drove her nuts. "These people are burning down buildings," she would say. My response would be something like "but Mama, they don't own the buildings." "Well, that's the only place they can shop." "Yeah, but they're shopping and anywhere else you go into the Black neighborhood bread is a dollar a loaf and you go over here to the grocery store in the White neighborhood and it's thirty-five cents a loaf so we're going to burn it down." "You can't." "Mama, I'm telling you, I've got the ballot and I've got the bullets and a Molotov cocktail. Now we're either going to change stuff from the inside or we're going to burn it down and let everybody start over on an even playing field. It doesn't really matter to me." I think that frightened my mother more than anything else that ever came out of my mouth because she firmly believed, and she had reason to believe, because I didn't lie, if I told you I was going to get you I was going to get you. If I told you I was going to burn something down, I meant to burn it down. Now, did I burn it down? No. But did I plan to burn it down. Probably if I told you I was going to burn it down, then yes, I was planning, I was scheming, because I believed two things: that a person should be a person of their word and that integrity and character count. So if I'm an educated person then I should be treated like an educated person not, oh, a Black educated person like I was some kind of special dispensation given to me because I was Black. As if I didn't have to work as hard for the degree that I have. This was one of the things that I jumped on my kids about with the Black Awareness Group, you have to be better than to be thought half as good as. It is the same thing that females have dealt with, it is the same thing that gays have dealt with, "Oh, you're a female so how are you going to be an historian, how are you going to be an anthropologist." You've got to prove yourself over and over and that was my line in the sand that day when he said, "Oh, you're too young." "No, I'm going. I am going." Now, did I go on any of the others? No. But I went that day because I'm a member and I'm going to do what everybody else is doing. I just refused to go home.

JD: Did you believe that non-violent resistance was effective?

FT: I believe that it was effective in certain situations. What I believed, like I just said, I believed that there are times that, well, I'll use the old, there's a saying that old people have, "Sometimes before you can get the mule to move you have to get his attention and sometimes to get his attention you need a two by four." I understood early on that money was the one thing that society put a high prize on. People getting killed, Black folks who are killed, that's one more nigger dead. Black women being raped, that's one more woman teasing somebody, it was always her fault. But take your money, put it back in your pocket and stop spending it, they start to pay attention. Television, which has been the bane of some here in this country. When people are looking at a T.V. and watching people who are sitting here cross-legged, not doing a thing, having dogs turned on them, having water cannons turned on them, seeing pregnant women drug and beaten, it touches the heart. You may think that the Blacks were wrong for sitting in but they're wrong for turning these water hoses on them. If you've ever watched "Eyes on the Prize" and you see the beatings that happen on the Edmund Pettus Bridge, there's no justifying that. The staunchest segregationist cannot justify that kind of beating. The staunchest segregation cannot justify killing three voting right workers and burying them because they have families, they have children, they have wives, and at some point your heart becomes touched. I told them thank God for God, because that's really what brought me to a better understanding because once you touch a person's heart you can change it. You can't change their minds, nobody can change your mind, I can't change your mind, you can't change mine. But you can say something or do something or show me something that will change my heart. I will then change my own mind and that, TV helped in that way so much because you've got two things going on juxtaposedly. You've got the Vietnam War which is beginning to ramp up and you've got sit-ins. Sometimes if they didn't have it on cameras, you couldn't tell the difference because all of these bodies are being stacked up in Vietnam and you see all of these people wounded and hurt in this country. I mean, Ali lost his title because he refused to go fight. Anybody else could take C.O. status and be fine but because he was who he was and in the position that he was in when he chose not to fight, "Oh, we're going to take his title, we're going to take his crown." They took it but that didn't change the character of the man. Television helped a lot, an awful lot.

In my case, and like I said, it takes a changing of the heart. I just, my mother wouldn't let me open her door when I was home for awhile because I'd open the door and if you'd been there and you were like, "Hi, I'm Jessica and I'm here to see Ms. Hattie." I'd say, "Whatever." I would have closed the door, locked it and made sure you heard me lock it and holler back and say, "Mama, some White girl's out here." You had no name. I treated you the way I had been treated. I treated you as the non-entity. Mama would be like, "Just don't open my door." Because I'd get ugly and I had to learn and again, it goes to heart, not head. When I married this Marine, well, when I started working with my kids I really made sure to emphasize to them you cannot judge all White people because not all of them turned dogs loose, not all of them turned on water hoses, not all of them spit on you. Judge people by the way they treat you but be aware of the history. That's what I was trying to teach the kids at the same time. Be aware of the history of this race, how they treated Native Americans, how they treated us, how they treated other countries that we've been involved with, but you cannot judge everyone. You have to

judge each one individually by how they treat you individually. But be aware of the race as a whole, which was a delicate balancing act. Well, I won't tell folks stuff that I don't believe so as I begin to tell them. I had to formulate how I was changing and had to accept how I was changing, that okay, I'm just not automatically going to hate White people because they're White. I've got to treat them based on how they treat me. What I did do, and I'll be honest about what I did, I met you and I was nice to you but I was cautious with you because you're White. But as I got to know you, depending on how you acted then we're cool and I introduce you to other folks. I had to look at myself and how do I want to raise these kids because I didn't want them to hate Whites. The funny part is Blacks didn't hate Whites, it was the other way around, which is what I think frightened a lot of people about say, Barrack Obama or even Maynard Jackson when he first became mayor in Atlanta. It was Lord, we've been treating these people like dogs, in fact, we've been treating them worse than dogs all these years, and payback is going to be a bitch. I'm sure that's what they thought and normal people would have. But the race as a whole didn't do that. Some individuals might have, in fact, I'm sure some individuals do, but as whole it was not a retaliatory process.

JD: Would you mark the time when you started having children as the time in your life when your personal views started changing?

FT: No, actually my personal views, because I only have one child; I call them my children, I have sixty kids that I helped raise but they weren't mine. I've always tried to be honest. You can't be honest with somebody else if you're not honest with yourself. So I try to formulate my personal code of conduct. Didn't necessarily agree with anybody else's but I did what I should be doing and it was just what I thought I should be doing. So with the children, when I was trying to make sure, because like I said, they were in integrated schools, they were not getting Black history, they didn't understand the history of Cobb County, they didn't understand the history of Marietta, they were getting what I call orange juice light or history light. They were getting the watered down version of, "Oh yes, there was slavery and then there was Jim Crow, well, actually then it was segregation, well, then there was reconstruction and then there was segregation and now there's integration." Like it all flowed so smoothly and that's not the way it happened. It was like pulling out fingernails. This was a tumultuous time in this country over a long, extended period of time so to make sure that these children understood and knew their history I taught history. To make sure they understood their value in the community, I made them do community projects. Education was key. I had homework time at the library I think at that time it closed at nine o'clock. I'd be down here at 12:30 or 1:00 getting homework, which had to be done to my satisfaction before you left the building. I had, mamas saying that, "They got to go to school tomorrow." My answer, "That's not my problem, they got to have this homework and it's got to be done right." My daughter will tell you, she had a teacher that I asked to have her removed from her room because it was supposed to be some kind of writing class and I looked it over and I was like, "But baby, it's one long, run-on sentence. Did you check spelling and stuff?" "My teacher doesn't care about that." So I called and I said, "Ma'am, I'm Tangalita's mother and I just looked over her paper." "Oh, it was a wonderful paper." "Ma'am, she has run-on sentences, she has commas inappropriately, she has misspelled words, she has no

capitalization. It's like she did stream of thought writing and she just turned it in." She says, "Well, we don't want to stifle their creativity." "Ma'am I want my child to be able to get a job and she cannot get a job like this." So, I had her removed from the class. I took her out of her phonics class when she was in first grade because I wanted her to learn to read whole words, not just phonetically because people who learn to read using only phonics usually don't spell very well. I taught too many of them. I taught Adult Ed, I taught secretarial training, they can't spell. Now I'm looking at Facebook and cell phones now and I'm realizing we're back to not being able to spell, but I wanted her to be able to get a job and the teacher just didn't understand. Well, I think you're a little hard on us. "Ma'am, I tell you what we're going to do, we're going to make it easy. We'll just switch her class." And I had her moved and I told her why. I said, "This lady doesn't have your best interests at heart. She says that she's allowing you to be creative and free, you can't sell this to anybody because nobody can read it because they have got to stop and go back trying to figure out what this misspelled word is or why this comma is here. Now, go back and write this story in a manner that is acceptable." So much so that the rest of the time my child was in high school, she said, "Mama, look at this but put your red pen down first," because I'd have a red pen in my hand somewhere. There are kids right now with grandkids who will tell you when they'd come to the library to show me something and I'd mark on it, they'd say, "We knew you were going to do that." Because I can't let it go. Okay, you're Black, that's no excuse for poor performance. By the time my child was three, I made her write and send thank you notes. We weren't stationed here, so if my mama sent her something, she sent a thank you note. What I would do is I would ask, "What do you want to tell granny about the new lunchbox?" She would answer something like, "I really like it because pink is my favorite color." I used to go and get those big writing tablets that you have for first graders and I would print, "Dear Granny, I really like my lunchbox. It's pink. That's my favorite color." And I would print in large letters, sometimes it would take three or four pages. Then we would sit down together and she would trace, that's all she was doing, she really wasn't writing, but she learned how to form these letters. Then we'd fold it up and have to put it in a brown envelope because it wouldn't fit in a regular envelope and we'd mail the thank you note. She learned two things: one, that Granny didn't owe her anything so she, (Granny), has a right to a thank you note for thinking of you; two, she learned to write, she learned to read. By the time she was three she was reading, she was writing. She'd write her own thank you notes. She'd write little notes, "Go home?" with a question mark because she'd gotten bored but she's asking me "can we go home?" I understood that but using her own language to teach her to read. I don't accept excuses and with these kids, it was what do I tell them? Do I prepare them for the world that is or the world that is to be? So what I tried to do is not only prepare them for the world that should be but what their place should be in it.

I know I did get at least one right because one little boy I ran into the other day who is not a little boy anymore, he's a grown man. He started laughing, he said, "You remember you used to get on me about my lessons and you'd stay on me and sometimes you'd put me out of the library because I wasn't studying and stuff?" And I said, "Yes, but it looks like it turned out okay because it looks like you got a job and stuff." He said, "I'm fine. My son just graduated from Harvard this June." He said, "I stayed on him the same way

you stayed on us. I'd keep him up all night going "No boy, get that and let me see this homework. Don't tell me it's done, let me see it." I didn't care what time I got home at night but I'd sit there and do it. We went over it and sometimes he'd be up all night but he just graduated. I did to him what you did to us because you were absolutely right. I said "Thank you." If I don't get but one thank you, I got it.

JD: Let me go back and ask about Bill Hutson, whom you said was chief of police at the time. Was he generally supportive of the Black community here?

FT: Bill Hutson was a fair man. I didn't know him, I mean, I knew him because of my mom but the one thing I know about him, and again, somebody else's perception may be different but Bill tried to be fair and apply the law fairly which in that day and time was unusual in and of itself because the rules seemed to bend. What is it, the scales of justice seemed to tilt towards Whites. The old joke, the African proverb, "the chicken does not stand a chance in court if both the judge and the jury are foxes." Well, that's kind of the way it was then, but Bill wasn't like that. He seemed to try to be fair. Now I'm sure he probably at some points in time used the word colored, nigger, I'm sure he did because it was what people said. But when it came to applying the law that was not the way he applied it. That's why in fact, he used to do a country boil and stuff and he ended up going to the Cobb County Police Department for awhile and I think now he's director of Georgia's department of safety and training and stuff, but he'd do a country boil and I would go. Sometimes I'd be the only Black person out there but it was like, no, the Bill I know tried to be fair or seemed, so my perception, like I said, I can only speak from mine. Somebody else might tell you, oh no, he was the most prejudiced man in the world. That may be, but what I saw was a person trying to fairly apply the law or equally apply the law to every situation to everybody.

JD: Let's talk a little bit about your experience at Albany State. The Albany Movement, which was in 1961 was before your time there but what sort of legacy did that leave?

FT: Well, it was still going on. Albany definitely didn't want to integrate and change. In fact, Albany, Dougherty County convinced the state of Georgia to build a junior college rather than have their White kids go to Albany State College so they actually had Albany Junior College which I thought it was funny. It happened while I was down there. There were definitely overt signs and areas of segregation, as opposed to Marietta, there were definite Black areas in Albany. There was resentment from the residents, and I think the resentment, and it was really funny because looking back, I believe the greater resentment was not that we were Black but that we were college educated, because they had the same attitude toward the Marines, Black or White. We had potentially a good job. That is an agricultural area there so, "Oh, you think you're better than me because you go to college, well, you're still colored." "Well, yeah, but I've got a degree and you don't." I really, in looking back, think that was part of the problem because the college initially was put on land that was in an area that flooded on a regular basis but people made do, they made it work and it grew. In fact, the college owns most of the land that was around it and stuff and we've expanded tremendously. I was back a couple years ago and couldn't believe how it has expanded. The church that I used to attend, this little

Black church which is where all the sit-ins started, this is where they did the training, didn't know it when I went, it was just about a block from campus and a block from the bowling alley. Now, when we went to the bowling alley, this is, by now this is '64 when I'm there. It was token segregation, trust me, we walk in, we're college students or they're military personnel, they got money. These people did not care. "How can I help y'all?" Okay, I know technically we don't serve Black people but they got money and that's the way they looked at it and that really began to solidify my bottom line that it's all about green. The old joke, he who has the gold makes the rules, that's the bottom line.

Albany State was a learning experience in a lot of ways for me because I ran into Blacks who came from very diverse backgrounds but we were all going to historically Black college because we knew we were guaranteed a good education, we knew that. I had a good friend whose parents were from down in Americus, I'm thinking, you poor thing, this is real country, this is where fighting goes on and lynching. Her daddy owns a dairy farm with 400 and something acres and he's raising Black Angus cows and stuff. Even I understood a Black Angus was the top of the line cow. Then I find out she's got her own car. Well, this was absolutely unheard of when most adults didn't have a car, but their parents bought each of them a car upon graduation from high school. One of the guys that played basketball came from Cincinnati. He drove his own Midget convertible down. Now my parents were, comparatively speaking, pretty well off, but wasn't nobody buying me a car. These kids were getting cars. But then I'd meet somebody else from the opposite end of the financial spectrum. I had a friend, in fact the guy that taught me to shoot pool. He was a pool shark, but somebody had told him and he believed that education was the way to a better life, not hustling in pool. Now, if he'd been White instead of Black, he would have been a new Minnesota Fats, he would have been playing on TV right now because he only played twice a year but he paid both of their tuition, all of their books, for the two times that he played so he was very good. Understand, we're talking about gas still being I think thirty-five, forty-five cents a gallon, so tuition is \$2,000 a year and to get \$4,000 twice a year to take care of her and his financial needs was a big deal. He told his sister if she graduated with decent grades that he would make sure that she went to college. They saw him paying for his way so they believed him. Once or twice a year he'd make enough money to pay both their tuitions. It was such a wide cross section because college and education was a great equalizer. Again, we go back to what you've got in your brain, nobody's going to take away from you. I watch teachers, that was the first time that I had been exposed to anything other than Black teachers so all of a sudden I've got Asian teachers and I've got Hispanic teachers and White teachers, and I'm looking at them like "Why are they here?" Because of course, I was a very suspicious person. I realized that they had the same work ethic as my high school teachers had had. All they wanted was for me to get a good education, to be a functioning part of society, that's all they wanted so it was a great experience for me.

JD: So you attended from '64 to '68?

FT: '69. Yes, I went on the five-year plan. I kept quitting to go to marches in Alabama and Tennessee and anywhere else.

JD: Tell me about those.

FT: I would just go. I mean, if they were having a march in Alabama and they wanted all of us to show up, we went. If Alabama State or Alabama A&M were having problems on their campus, we'd all show up. You're sitting there thinking "Okay, the school actually only has 1,000 people, why are there 5,000 kids out here?" Well, that's because kids from Savannah State and Ft. Valley State, and Miles University South Carolina, we were all there in support. I kept deciding I really didn't want to teach, I didn't want to teach, I didn't want to teach, even though I was very, very good at it. So, one year I just came home at Thanksgiving and didn't go back until January. I took no finals and passed all my classes and it was so funny because one female teacher told me, "I can't give you a grade until you take the final." I said, "Okay, just give me an F." She said, 'I'm not giving you an F, you're going to take the final.'" I stood at her desk with a pen and a pencil and went through it and it took me about twenty minutes and I handed it back to her and I said, "There you go, now you can give me the F." She checked it and she said, 'No, I'm not giving you the F, I'm giving you the A that you made.'" I wasn't in school for six weeks but my grades up to that point were great and the reason she wouldn't give me an F even though I showed up to her class once a week because she had an exam on Friday. She had tests every Friday so I'd show up on Friday to take the test. I have stood by her desk and taken the test and then walked off. Going to Albany was very different for me because it is so rural and it was so southern and it was a lot of things that I was not used to.

JD: Can you tell me a little bit about the Black Awareness Group that you started and the Heritage Museum that you're working on?

FT: Yes. The Black Awareness Group was a group of teenagers that I found myself mentoring. They'd come in and go, "Ms. Fefe, so-and-so." Especially stuff still going on at Marietta High and whatever. Okay, now you need to look at it this way and put this in perspective, (at this time Marietta High had only been fully integrated for about two or three years, so there were still issues), and I started talking to them and finally they wanted to do something. I said, "I'll tell you what let's do. Let's go ahead and form you all into a club, elect officers and I will act as advisor." Because there were times I'd be sitting there telling them about things in Black history and stuff that they weren't getting. I said, "We'll devote part of the time each day that you all come, each meeting time, to Black history, both local and national and international and talk about whatever is on your mind. You have to promise me that the rules that I'm going to lay down for you you'll be able to follow." "Yeah, yeah, we'll do it." So they sat down and they formed a group and they called themselves, gosh, at first they had all kinds of names and when I talked to them I said, "What are you trying to do?" "You're going to teach us about Black history and we're going to do this and that." I said, "Okay, let's call it the Black Awareness Group because that's what I want you to do, be aware that you are Black, be aware of your history, be aware of your place in the community." "Okay, cool, because then we can tell everyone to get out of your old bag and get into our bag" and they actually had t-shirts made up. I actually have my old t-shirt that says "Get out of your

bag, get in our bag.” It was to get out of the old habits and get into the habit of learning and supporting the Black community. I watched my kids organize community block parties, I watched them organize community cleanups and when I say organize, I would advise but they had to do the work. Just like Dr. Scott’s got you down here trying to talk to me, they had to do the work. They had to contact the city of Marietta to see if they could get a special pick up on Saturdays. They had to arranged to go into these people’s houses and say “Look, we’re going to have a dump truck come, if you’ve got old furniture or old refrigerators, whatever it is that needs to come out, we will be by that Saturday to take it out for you. Set it on the curb, it’ll be moved, it won’t be an eye sore.” They arranged with the city of Marietta to have the sweepers come, they went to every person who had a car and said “You need to move your car that day because we’re going to clean this street and then we’re going to have a block party afterwards.” They did it. I just sat back there and listened. But that’s what they were supposed to do. That’s what my parents did to me, that’s what my teachers did to me, but they didn’t have anybody doing it because one, their parents were working so hard to maintain this style of living and it became more difficult. The other was that they didn’t have anybody that cared enough to do it. I did and I pushed and I pushed and grades were important. They will tell you I showed up in their classrooms, I stayed down here at the library, I did whatever needed to be done to get them through school. I threatened kids, believe me, I had one kid I forced to walk from Marietta Middle School back over to Old Marietta High school. He cut school that day to go see his little girlfriend who was in eighth grade. I saw him. I made him walk; he walked down South Marietta Parkway. The police pulled us over and said “Ma’am is there a problem?” “No, he cut school. He walked over here he’s going to walk back.” They said “Ma’am, I can’t let you have this kid walking in the street like this.” I said, “Okay, he can walk on the sidewalk.” So we put him up on the sidewalk and the cop left. I immediately stopped my car and said, “Get your behind back down on the street.” He said, “But the cop said,” and he repeated what the cop has just said to us. I said, “Yeah, but you see, the cop don’t know what I know. You’ll try to run if you’re on the sidewalk then I have got to stop and park my car and chase you. If you’re in the street I’ll just run over you. Now get in the street.” By the time we got back to the Marietta High, school was getting out for the day. We marched into Edna Lee’s office, she was the principal at the time at Marietta High, and I said, “This young man cut school today but I don’t think he’ll cut tomorrow.” She said, “Thomas, where have you been?” In fact, it was Wanda’s brother, the lady I mentioned earlier. She said, “Where have you been?” I said, “He was over there at Marietta Middle School.” She said, “Are you over there seeing ...?” and she called the little girl’s name. I said, “That’s where he was.” I said, “He won’t go tomorrow.” He finished school on time, we didn’t have a problem. He said, “You would have hit me with the car.” I said, “Yes, and your mama’s a nurse so it would have been okay.”

JD: Is the group something that’s still going on?

FT: No it is not. But all of my kids know the one thing I told them they had to do, because they used to tell me, “Oh, when we grow up we’re going to do this and we’re going to take care of you.” “No, what you’re going to do is, when you see somebody else’s kid that’s not getting the attention, who’s not living up to their potential, is not doing what

they're supposed to do, you're going to reach back and pull that kid kicking and screaming like I had to pull some of you and say, let me tell you what you're going to do. This is not an option. Failure is not an option. You will graduate, you will go to college, you will do this, you will stay out of jail, you will do whatever you need to do to succeed. That's what you're going to do." And when I run into my kids they're deacons in the church, they're pastors, they're mothers, they're fathers, they're school teachers. So no, the group is not still together, no. One of the girls who ended up working at Lockheed, when she died, immediately I got one call from her husband's sister and she called to let me know and within ten minutes I had calls from three of the other kids saying, "Ms. Taylor, I'm just letting you know that Laura passed and I'll call you back when I know the arrangements and stuff." And then the next one would call and say, "Okay, she passed and they're going to do this and when." This was our group, this was our family.

I took those sixty kids, which is when I think I knew my husband was all right because I took those sixty kids in various cars and vans to Six Flags. You take sixty teenagers, the youngest was thirteen, the oldest was nineteen. That was the deal, once you turn nineteen, after that you had to become an advisor too because what I was trying to do was raise up a group that could be self-perpetuating. We took them all. We went on a picnic and all I said was, "Nobody should be pregnant in the next ten months. No baby should be born this year. If the baby isn't born next week no excuses, no exceptions." "Oh, Ms. FeFe!" "I'm just saying, I'm bringing little girls today whose parents don't let them date. Don't make me wish that I had not done this." We didn't have any problems. The kids all decided that I was crazier than anybody they knew. I told my daughter and I told her friends, you need to think there is at least one person who is crazy enough to actually kill or physically hurt you for messing up. Not abuse you but for messing up and betraying their trust there is one crazy person I know. I'm sure there is at least one in your life. It might be a Sunday School teacher, it might be a former teacher, there is one person that you keep thinking "I really don't want to tell them I messed up." Everybody else you tell, they're going to be mad but they'll understand but there's one person that if you mess up you don't want to tell them because they are crazy and they will be disappointed.

JD: What about the Heritage Museum? What's your vision for that?

FT: That every room in this building shows some aspect of Black history in Cobb County. One room could be the room that deals with all of the schools, because see there were private schools for Blacks before the city of Marietta actually built a school. One room would be for the churches. We've got churches over 100 and something years old. We've got churches in Cobb County that started before the Civil War. One room devoted to churches, one room devoted to education, one room devoted to our military. The first guy to die in Vietnam was a Black kid that went to, well, he actually ended up going to Marietta High, but he was Black. It should be noted. Politics; all of the Black people that ran for city council before Hugh Grogan won and before James Dodd was on the Board of Education, and my mom on the housing authority or Charles Ferguson on the hospital board. This is a part of that political scene and government that people don't know about. Then, of course, we want to feature the entertainers and the artists and then we want a room that has the athletes. And, of course, most importantly, a community

room that talks about the Go Rain or Shine Club, the Penny Pinchers Club, the Sportsman Twenty, the Corporate Twelve, the Bomber City Elks, the Masons, the Eastern Star. These were all groups that were community social groups every one of which have part of their charter raising and maintaining the standards of our community and helping to raise our children. There should be a room devoted to these people because they didn't write books, they just lived their lives in such a way that their children could do better so there should be a place that really glorifies this and preserves this history. I've already said that in the cafeteria, I want to have the artists' exhibit. One room is a gift shop, which will highlight local artists of all kinds but it will also highlight people who write about Black history and put it in time context.

JD: Well, it's been a pleasure talking to you today and I thank you for your time.

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